



East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences

ejass.eanso.org

Volume 6, Issue 2, 2023

Print ISSN: 2707-4277 | Online ISSN: 2707-4285

Title DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-4285>



EAST AFRICAN
NATURE &
SCIENCE
ORGANIZATION

Original Article

Reconfiguring Gothic-Postmodernism: A Reading of Namina Forna's (2021) The Gilded Ones

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Article DOI : <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.6.2.1349>

Date Published: ABSTRACT

02 August 2023

Keywords:

*Identity,
Magic realism,
Mystery,
Phantasmagoria,
Postmodernism.*

This paper explores Namina Forna's (2021) debut novel, *The Gilded Ones*, as manifesting postmodern aspects which allow the text to comment on twenty-first-century life. Forna employs certain parameters of postmodernism that elucidate the postmodern lifestyle. Anchored on the bedrock of postmodernism, this paper dissects the selected text in order to reveal an artistic trajectory that captures the pulse and the tempor contemporaneous with postmodern life. Postmodernism has brought a revolution in the way a text is appreciated since it rejects the limiting boundaries of art and allows plurality of interpretations. Locating Forna's text, *The Gilded Ones* within postmodernism theory, this paper employed a library-based close reading to explore the rejuvenation of horrors and fears encapsulated in the twenty first century. It engaged an interpretivist research design that allowed data to be chiselled out of primary text and coded for interpretation. Judgmental sampling was done to arrive at Forna's *The Gilded Ones* since the text is replete with postmodernist aspects. The study is instrumental in addressing the fluidity of identity from a numinous paradigm allowing the physical or reality and phantasmagoria to conflate. The paper avers that Forna in her selected text, encapsulates the mechanics and aspects of Gothic-postmodernism which captures succinctly issues contemporaneous with the postmodern society. Gothic aesthetics have been used to dignify and elevate the history of a community. It is hoped that the study makes significant contribution on the dialectics surrounding identity as it voices postmodern fears. The study is instrumental in rooting for the recognition of Africa's postmodern genre.

APA CITATION

Chepkwony, J. K. A. & Wendo, N. (2023). Reconfiguring Gothic-Postmodernism: A Reading of Namina Forna's (2021) *The Gilded Ones*. *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 6(2), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.6.2.1349>

CHICAGO CITATION

Chepkwony, Julius Kipkorir and Nabea Wendo. 2023. "Reconfiguring Gothic-Postmodernism: A Reading of Namina Forna's (2021) *The Gilded Ones*". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 6 (2), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.6.2.1349>.

HARVARD CITATION

Chepkwony, J. K. A. & Wendo, N. (2023) "Reconfiguring Gothic-Postmodernism: A Reading of Namina Forna's (2021) The Gilded Ones". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 6(2), pp. 1-10. doi: 10.37284/eajass.6.2.1349.

IEEE CITATION

J. K. A., Chepkwony & N., Wendo "Reconfiguring Gothic-Postmodernism: A Reading of Namina Forna's (2021) The Gilded Ones". *EAJASS*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 1-10, Aug. 2023.

MLA CITATION

Chepkwony, Julius Kipkorir & Nabea Wendo. "Reconfiguring Gothic-Postmodernism: A Reading of Namina Forna's (2021) The Gilded Ones". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, no. 2, Aug. 2023, pp. 1-10, doi:10.37284/eajass.6.2.1349.

INTRODUCTION

The world today is plagued by many happenings and actions that need interpretation in order to have a better insight. However, in a world of diversity, it becomes challenging to attain absolute interpretation of events as there are many socio-political, cultural, and economic factors at play. Of importance are many competing interpretations that allow divergent views to interact, thus, engage people in healthy polemics. The twenty first century has witnessed a deluge of myriad socio-cultural, political and health issues. The covid-2019 pandemic has had great impact on the lives and economic status of citizens. Spreading fast as it kills people on its path, the pandemic has been touted as the worst virus in the world's history. The virus has projected the world as tragic and humanity has been brought out as tragic elements scuttling to the future under forces beyond their control.

Literature, as a social construct, uses language to create a fictional or imaginary world that mirrors contemporary society. With all the contradictions inherent in society, postmodernism offers a unique trajectory in interpretation of texts. It creates a world that celebrates contradictions, fragmentations, and dislocations. Moreover, societies are beset by uncertainties, sense of despair, and disillusionment. Human existence is unfathomable even when scholars attempt to describe it in tangible terms since no absolute meaning exists. This also applies to postmodernism as no one distinct definition is suffice. Postmodernism cuts across a gamut of other disciplines that includes art, history, architecture,

and technology. In literature, Hutcheon (2005) examines the term postmodernism as "...a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts the very concepts it challenges" (1). It is a theory that advances contradictions and celebrates decentredness and fragmentation of major aspects of life. This is affirmed by Bahadur (2020) who opines that postmodernism: "...frequently serves as an ambiguous overarching term for sceptical interpretations of culture, literature, art, philosophy... and literary criticism" (3).

The paper is in concurrence with Hooti and Torkamaneh's (2011) sentiments who opine that postmodernism:

Is a dramatic deviation of man's thought line, it is a renaissance towards the fossilized shackles of the prescribed norms and notions, which have changed into economic and political institutions (4).

Postmodernism represent a phenomenon in literary criticism. It gives freedom of interpretation and of analysing a text in a more liberal way since there is no totalization of meaning and singular interpretation. Meaning in literary texts is not only fluid but is also unstable and unfixd. Postmodernism has many proponents and theorists, key among them include; Jean Baudrillard, Lyotard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Julia Kristeva and Michel Foucault. The techniques and elements used to narrativize events and happenings in postmodernist fiction discombobulate readers since they contravene expectations. These features vary from temporal distortion, pastiche, historiographic-

metafiction, poioumena to magic realism among the many. Their degree of deployment in literary texts to unmask reality varies from one text to another.

Postmodernism seems to distrust singular form of thought and explores a novel to unravel other possible realities created of the world. The ideologies, as well as the style, are often at variance with normalized expectations. Postmodernism also has no impartial, half-truths or “true” truths. Truth is seen as relative and depends on socio-cultural, political, economic aspects and mental attitude. Therefore, there are many ‘truths’ as there are many interpretations. The postmodernists treat lies and truths as synonymous since what is true today becomes a lie later. Facts are human constructs just like truths and are inclined towards a given desired direction; they may not differ from opinions. The issue of morality too is relative since it is more of an opinion. Truth is often generated by those who want to control the masses and herd them in a particular trajectory.

Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* like Robert Serumanga’s *Majangwa (The promise of Rain)* exemplify texts that are postmodernist. The texts employ unconventional techniques to comment about the fragmented and alienated life. The main characters are engaged in seemingly meaningless prattle as they attempt to pass time depicting a vain, purposeless life. Serumanga’s text depicts the two degenerate characters, Majangwa and Nakirijja whose meaning of life is lopsided. They have been shunned by the community since they display live pornographic performances to earn five Uganda shillings per show. On the other hand, the two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon are guided by the edict ‘nothing to be done’ which privileges helplessness and absurdity in life. Coelho’s (1992) uses the fabulous to narrativize Santiago’s (the lead character) quest in locating a treasure he is shown in a dream. In the desert he talks to the wind which assists him to defeat the desert raiders. Okorafor’s (2015) Zahrah in *Zahrah the Windseeker* levitates to the air once she has snatched an egg from the

terrifying, horror-some, deadly animals, elgorts. All these texts manifest different facets of postmodernism. Postmodernism, therefore, is set apart from conventionalism and cuts a niche as the most controversial criticism in literature.

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper is premised on the exploration of postmodern strategies and elements that allow the interpretation of twenty first century life as espoused by Forna’s *The Gilded Ones*. This study examined some of the salient features of Forna’s selected work that reconfigure postmodernism as a commentary of the current life. Of importance was chiselling out data that had relevant postmodern strategies and techniques for coding and interpretation in line with the topic at hand. The study located itself within postmodernism; and more specifically, magic realism as propagated by Franz Roh, a German art critic who examined magic aspect within realism as “the magic of being” (Bowers, 2005, p. 8) that celebrated the world’s rational aspects; Alejo Carpentier, a Cuban writer and Massimo Bontempelli, an Italian writer popularized magic realism as a mode of narration in the 1920s and 1930s. This paper shares Aljohani’s (2016) trajectory on the nuances of magic realism. He opines that:

It is a literary trend in postmodernism, in which magical elements are introduced into a realistic atmosphere with a view to have a deeper understanding of reality (75).

Multiple perspectives of reality underpin magical realist novels since reality and magicity are juxtaposed together in a seamless parallel in order to mirror society. This argument is in concurrence with Bowers (2005) who asserts that: “Magic can be a synonym for mystery, an extra-ordinary happening, or the supernatural” (4) while magic realism fuses “the two opposing aspects of the oxymoron, the magical and the realist together to form a new perspective” (3). Through purposive sampling, Forna’s text *The Gilded Ones* was arrived

at as it is pregnant with magic realism. Qualitative research method that is library based was used to excavate and chisel out data that was required for analysis and interpretation. The design used was interpretivist.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forna's (2021) fiction *The Gilded Ones* renders itself to a Gothic-postmodernist reading. The text embraces cultural and political awareness to create a polyglot society. Deka (the lead protagonist) a sixteen-year-old girl, lives in fear of a cultural Rite of Purity that determines whether she gets married if she is pure or is banished if impure. Purity is reflected when a girl bleeds red but if the blood turns gold, she is a demon and is ostracized. She is, consequently, forced to face a situation worse than death. Fornal (2021) fortifies her text using a postmodern philosophy that is captured in the prologue "nothing and no one are quite what they seem..." (1). Reality is created and is never permanent; relationships too are cosmetic since they do not last. People ascribe themselves different identities in their daily interactions allowing postmodernism to examine humanity as multi-perspective in identity. Postmodernism, according to Elaati (2016) manifests "a crisis of identity of human beings (ethnic, sexual, social and cultural) and its struggle for legitimization" (16). Deka undergoes a cultural rite that attempts to re-define her identity.

Forna's text, *The Gilded Ones* follows a journey of the protagonist, Deka, a young girl, who fails in her Rite of Purity ritual when her blood turns gold and is regarded as impure and, therefore, a monster. Being shunned by the community because of her brown complexion Deka feels that her place in the society is not there when her blood runs gold. This mystifies her identity as she begins to ask herself who she is: "I've been in lrfut my entire life, born and raised, and I'm still treated like a stranger – still stared and pointed at, still excluded ..." (Forna 2021:10). She does not have the latitude to look at herself in the mirror and be proud of her image. She

is culturally shunned and ostracized as impure and is made not to belong. Not able to coalesce and be part of Otera community, she has to make a choice between surviving as an outcast or joining 'alaki' and becoming part of the warriors who are expected to overcome the empire's greatest threat, the death shriek monsters. 'Alaki' are described as girl soldiers who offer protection to the kingdom.

This paper acknowledges that Fornal's text exemplifies aspects of postmodernism, particularly magic realism. The fantastical elements merge and integrate reality with fiction. Thus, the fantastic elements intersect with the everyday life in Otera Kingdom. Deka, emerges as a girl who has a gift of the fantastical. From the onset of the novel, she communicates with the deadly monsters, the death shrieks (beasts), in a way that people do not understand her; nor does she understand herself. On the day of the cultural Rite of Purity ritual, death shrieks strike the village. Deka's gift of intuition allows her to visualize the death shrieks getting ready to ambush the village: "something is coming" (Forna, 22). Her fantastical sense comes in folds to forewarn her of the lurking danger:

Fear has frozen my lips, and all I can do is watch in horror as a sinister tendril of mist snakes around Father 's feet. More of it is slithering into the square chilling the air ..." (Forna, 22)

She is made to become aware of the mist emanating from the edge of the forest that heralds the ferocious beasts. What follows is a battle between the *Jatu* (soldiers) and the death shrieks that gravitate to maiming and killing.

The death shrieks are atrocious monsters that kill with abandon laying siege to a whole village: "...disembowelling them (*Jatu*) with fatally sharp claws" (24). They cause fear, horror and dread which are postmodern aspects that are contemporaneous with the twenty first century society. It rejuvenates terror related issues, bigotry, and misogyny. The world has witnessed the negative side of racialism in American. Racism is

dreaded by American blacks because of its brutal nature. In May 2020, George Floyd's life was snapped out when a White police officer pressed his knee on the neck culminating into the famous plea for life "I can't breathe". This spurred widespread nationwide protests and demonstrations against the police brutality. It is not lost to this paper that the brutalities meted by white police on innocent blacks have demonstrated the stark hypocrisy deflating the 'American dream' and making it ooze with racial undertones. Other terrors and horrors of the twenty first century are caused by terror groups and religious intolerance. The world is well aware of this dread which has caused many countries to suffer including Kenya. Terrorism undermines human relation and co-existence by eliciting fear to achieve allegiance. Kenya has borne the brunt of the wanton attack when in 2015; terrorists killed "a hundred and forty-seven students" (Army & Jesen 2015:1). This caused immense fear and dread that is resonates with Forna's *The Gilded Ones* through the horror from death shrieks.

Postmodern philosophy has devalued life with little or no redemption as seen through wanton massacres by deadly death shrieks. This has reduced life to not only being tragic but also meaningless. This study contends that the current life is characterized by disenchantment, fragmentation, and fear from the unknown. This is illustrated by the Covid 2019 pandemic that has killed many people in the world and continue to cause fear and dread.

It is only Deka who can stop the killing since the death shrieks have overpowered the *Jatus*: "The *Jatu* try to fight black but there are too few of them and they're too inexperienced against the death shrieks' monstrosity" (Forna 2021:24). The helpless villagers only watch "...as limbs and bodies are served with inhuman abandon, heads ripped off with ferocious glee..." The ritual Rite of Purity is turned to a battle ground with death shrieks having a field day in the massacre of villagers. Not even the elders' prayers hold them back as "...the more the

village men scream, the more frenzied the death shrieks become..." (Forna, 24).

Deka's fantastical inner being comes out to make her more assertive and tame the uncontrollable beasts. Her plea "STOP"! PLEASE! Leave my father alone! Please leave us alone!" (Forna, 25) demystifies the raging monsters. Her second command:

STOP! I shout, my voice even more powerful than before. The death-shriek abruptly stiffens, life draining on its eyes. For a moment, it almost seems a husk - an empty vessel, rather than a living being. The other death shrieks are the same: frozen statues in the late afternoon light..." (25) indicate her fantastical ability to tame the monsters.

Deka, therefore, manages to control the monsters using the power of her word. The death shriek "turns and staggers towards the forest the others follow behind it" (25) which momentarily shows Deka triumphing against the dark forces of death. Her redeeming gesture is only but short - lived. Having witnessed her magical - powers, her father castigates her as "a foul demon, a beast" (25). Being demonized as one of the beasts makes her to re-think about her identity within the cultural dispensation. Her concrete reality is that she does not have a bond with the village but in the wild; with the beasts of nature. The existence of her hidden identity lingers and she becomes perplexed of herself. Being in possession of dual identity shows how Forna employs magic realism to disrupt fixed forms of truth, reality, and cultural gendering.

This paper rationalizes that Forna cleverly manipulates magic realism to create a fictional world where events oscillate between unreal and real, fantastical, and physical, foregrounding a numinous zone in the postmodern world. According to Anderson (2016) "the magic and realism are both similarly indispensable, because each relies on the other in order to fully create a world" (21) within the selected text. The elders, led by Elder Durkas, confirm that Deka's blood is gold when her

supposed boyfriend, Ionas, thrusts a sword onto her stomach. The red blood that turns to gold clearly reveals her as an impure girl. She descends to unconsciousness and when she comes to she is chained in a cellar and is treated like a leper.

Deka's magical nature allows her to live after death. This is seen when her father comes in the name of cleansing the family of demonic powers. Her father morphs her to the realm of death through the action of slicing her using the gleaming sword. Her acceptance of being a demon is seen after being killed. She resurrects thereby, showing that she transcends death. Her transcendence clothes her with a newer body that has no old marks. She has neither scars nor any blemish on her skin; an epitome of magical transformation demonstrating her strange and mysterious character. She is reborn in her magical resuscitation and confesses "It is as if I have been completely reborn. Even my childhood scars are gone" (Forna, 30). This allows her to transform from an innocent young girl to a hurting anguished character whose rejection by the family make her aware of her incompatibility with the community. Her supernatural transformation mysteriously becomes a representation of her inner self that animalistic. Fornas uses the image of terror, horror, death and fragmented identity to evince the concerns of the twenty first century that define societies.

Her death, regarded as symbolic, allows her to ascend to a phantasmagorical immortal state; demonized as a monster and viewed as a paradox. Her demonic body vacillates as half-animal, half-human. This demonization comes in her acceptance of what she has transcended to. She affirms "... I am a demon" (Forna, 30) bringing to light the question of "mutability of ascendancy of self" (Beville 2009:131) which mediates between two realms; understandable realm and an unfathomable one. After being beheaded Deka's "fibres of your (the) neck stretched their way back to your (her) bloody body and re-attached" (Forna, 31) a testimony of her resurrection from death. Unable to sustain death the

only choice for her is to join 'alaki' soldiers to protect Emperor Gezo and the Kingdom or so she is made to believe. She has managed to live beyond "Beheading, burning, drowning, hanging, stoning and disembowelling, blood-letting dismemberment" (Forna, 37) dying and resurrecting nine times which demonstrates her unique ability.

Magic realism, an aspect of postmodernism, contorts reality in order to create an impossibly possible world where fantastical events merge with realistic happenings. As a demonized character that lives beyond death, Deka demonstrates ascension to a numinous realm from where she can manipulate her body. In postmodernism, as indicated earlier, characters possess multiple identities all of which conflate in the person. It allows the exploration of the split identity and the dark psyche that stores the real self of the character. Deka's multiple identities are demonstrated, first in how the villagers treat or mistreat her; secondly, how she feels and know about herself and thirdly, how the elders mistreat her once they realize she is not normal. She is shunned at the beginning of the novel because of her noticeable skin colour. She is looked down upon as a lesser being and this belittling assists her to form and concretize her self-concept. Her innocence allows her to experience the evil of the world since she is judged from a cultural perspective by elders. She metamorphoses from pristine innocence, to fear of unknowability before the truth of realizing she is half animal dawn on her.

In an attempt to make Deka "totally" and "completely" dead, the elders obey the laws of 'Oyomo' (god) with a religious fervor that is unmatched. Elder Durkas, Oyomo's representative on earth, does priestly duties with overzealous faith in enforcing the 'Death Mandate' to impure girls. This leaves Deka with no choice other than to accompany White Hands (Fatu) to the city, Hameira and join the *alaki* soldiers by choice. Their travel to the city is fantastic as it by means of magical "equus; horse lords, they (that) have human chests sprouting from their horse-like lower bodies and

talons where hooves should be” (Forna, 41). The creatures are mythical and exemplify the cyclical unity of the world of humans, animals, and spirits within African milieu. The two equus named Masaima and Braima are endowed with human attributes for they use human language to communicate. Magic realism opens a world of fantasy where abnormal behaviour is normalized. In what is regarded as pastiche; elements of fantasy are pasted into postmodern genre. The magical animals belong to what Dekka describes as “ethereal otherworldly way...” (Forna, 41). A world of magic where even large lizards like creatures called zerizards “make strange squawking noises deep in their throats” (Forna, 58).

Magic realism allows an otherworldly to merge with the physical one in a Gothic-postmodern nexus. Dekka, the protagonist, elevate herself as possessing divine transience and is regarded as Gothic character who stands in the porous boundary between believability and fantastical. She slides across the in-between liminal space allowing herself to restore order and peace. Her non-human domain of beingness makes her ripe to change the course of history and restore an old order in the kingdom. The liminal space, as has been observed delineates her from the everyday human world and affirms her dual identity: belonging and unbelonging, presence and absence in a world inundated with postmodern crises.

The training given to the *alaki* at Warthu Bera in the city is on how to combat and subdue the menacing deathshrieks. Her being branded a demon allows Dekka to feel estranged and distanced from the world of the living. In her own words, she feels a total stranger to the normal world “A world I’m not certain I want any part of it. A world that certainly wants no part of me” (Forna, 73). She examines herself as a character whose identity is ambiguous, unfathomable, and enigmatic; allowing her to metamorphose into both human and a supernatural creature. The postmodern boundaries of selves become porous as Dekka cannot subscribe to either

world. She remains within the liminal hybrid space of both knowing and unknowing herself; standing at the middle, not defining who or what she is since she is connected to the two worlds. Her feelings of illegitimacy in the world of the living, does not assuage her existence that is chained to a cultural cellar.

Another element of magical realism is Dekka’s communication with death shriek monsters. As indicated earlier when she commands them to stop the massacre at Irfut village their obeisance is not in doubt which discombobulates the terrified villagers. She exemplifies a connection with them. She controls them in a form of telepathic contact coupled with her “strength, cunning, and resilience” (Forna, 96). She becomes suitable to lead the *alaki* army into battle and fight for the glory of Otera” (96) and triumph over the deathshrieks. Dekka becomes the lead ‘alaki’ in raids against the monsters. This is made possible since she possesses an intuition that can show her the whereabouts of monsters before-hand. The training led by ‘Karmokos’ (trainers) is quite intense and brutal. They are advised to believe that; “No opponent is infallible...” (Forna, 167)

Dekka’s ability of controlling the deathshrieks is observed when she gives an intentional command to Rattle, a male death shriek caged in Warthu Bera training camp. “Rattle, kneel!” (Forna 154) upon which the monster “slowly but surely sinks to his knees, a vacant look in his eyes” (154) which clearly shows her relation with the animal world. She becomes part of the animal world; one of the characters, one of deathshrieks. With that abnormal ability to control the monsters, Dekka is made to occupy a central role during raids. These raids are more of revenge missions since majority of the girls have been affected by deathshrieks. Even their male counterparts have borne the brunt. Keita’s family was wiped out by the deadly animals.

This study acknowledges that postmodern terror and horror is rejuvenated in the current dispensation through terror attacks and revenge missions, counter

attacks, and inter-clan warfare. Like deathshrieks, such wars cause miseries, anguish, and untold suffering. Characters like Keita are rendered orphans and homeless yet they hide their pain in their smiles. But deep inside they seek revenge. Attempting to understand the postmodern world is futile. Deka attempts to rationalize many events which have happened to her but all in vain. She gives up and only thinks about absolution, when they will be free; having been absolved of their sins in order to lead normal lives there-after. She uses her mythical powers during death shriek raids to placate and calm them down. Her ability to see during darkness allows her to identify "...the creatures... shimmering with that strange, unearthly glow ..." (Forna, 171).

Her tracking the monsters using their heartbeats is a magical power only given to her: "Their (deathshrieks') heartbeat shine brightest of all living drums that pound so loudly, I can almost feel them vibrating under my skin" (Forna, 171). Her command "Come down here" (Forna 172) makes the beastly animals to comply by losing their liveliness and animation. Their humility and loyalty to Deka, leads them to their deaths. To assist her in the fights, Deka manages to domesticate a pet 'Ixa' a shape-shifter that is "feline half the time but occasionally transforms into a gigantic monstrosity when need arises" (Forna, 213). Shape-shifters are aspects of magic realism that recreates a world of infinite possibilities. Deka too has the ability to shape-shift. When using her "blood power" to control deathshrieks she morphs into one of them, her eyes change and her skin becomes leathered like a death shriek's.

Killing deathshrieks makes Deka to begin questioning her conscience over subduing the beasts that relate to her in an almost human form. Being an amalgamation of a monster and a human being as perceived by her close friends Gazal, Belcalis and Britta, Deka's essence transcends human realm and her identity is completely lost to her. Her fear of knowing her identity begins to terrorize her as

realization dawns on her that she is "some sort of death shriek half-breed" (Forna, 218) more of animal than human. The realization of being a death shriek makes her begin to question held cultural and political beliefs. She loses her human identity and attempts to rationalize events which fuel her passion to know the truth.

Her manifestation of her repressed self exposes her identity as a demonic death shriek; half human who is familiar with the essence of the deadly beasts. Such demonic figure, according to Beville (2009) "...emerges as the foundation for the concept of plural identity and even non-plural identity where loss of self ... have been at the centre of the narrative..." (152). Her conscience is further pricked when Katya one of her friends who was an *alaki* but killed by deathshrieks admits to Deka that:

Deathshrieks and alaki...we're one and the same when an alaki dies her final death, she is reborn as a death shriek. The emperor knows that. That's why he's using you to kill us. He is using you to destroy your own kind (Forna, 266).

The knowledge of reincarnation becomes a turning point for Deka and she realizes that the grand narrative is a big lie. Katya's reincarnation as a deathshriek emboldens Deka to offer her protection. In her monster form, her voice rumbling with an inhuman reverberation, she advises her newfound colleagues: "Deathshrieks! I roar to any who are in hearing distance protect Katya" (Forna, 266). Deathshrieks obey the command and shield Katya as they begin to butcher the 'Jatus'. As a traitor she has to be killed by Emperor Gezo. It is Keita the man she loves who offers himself to save her by dismembering her body. The act of dismembering will not give her a final death; in a way it is the only way to save her as she will resurrect. The killing allows her to metamorphose to an undead character.

Her inability in distinguishing the real from the false is what characterizes Deka. She is driven against her will to become an *alaki* because of her cultural inconformity. She develops her wild personality

from within her double-self or doppelganger by blending phantasmagoria with physical morphing. At first, she is made to believe that deathshrieks are her worst enemies. Later, when she reconnects with them in a half-human, half-animal form, truth dawns on her. She is part of the animal world and killing the deathshrieks is murdering her own kind since they are *alaki* reincarnate. And while she does not see a reflection of herself within the cultural prism of Otera Kingdom, she turns to her monster allies for unity of purpose. She, together with Fatu (White Hands) mounts a rebellion against Emperor Gezo. Fatu had been deposed from being Empress of Otera and she had been bidding her time, planning well before executing her political take over. Her plans began with Dekka's conception. Dekka's birth is manifested as of divine heritage. Her mother's golden blood allowed her to seek help from Fatu:

We waited till she was of age to carry you, and then, as she bathed in the warthu Bera's lake I put your seed into the waters. Ten months later there you were shaped in both her image and that of the man she chose to raise you. The perfect mimicry of human... (Forna, 277).

This paper contends that she is created for a purpose: to ferment a rebellion in order to topple Emperor Gezo. Her birth becomes mythical as she is seen as "Nuru" a deliverer; a messiah whose intent is to free the mothers. Her noble action is to free both 'alaki' and deathshrieks; the goddesses that are silhouetted at the temple. Emperor Gezo is seen as oppressive, dictatorial and exploitative while the goddesses stand for freedom, Justice and fairness. New dispensation of freedom dawns in Otera kingdom when Emperor Gezo is finally annihilated and killed.

Magic realism has been used by Forna to reclaim both dignity and Otera's history. The cultural claims of injustice, bigotry, misogyny and gendering are brought to an end. Harmony and peaceful co-existence is restored. In postmodernism truth and lies are used synonymously. A grand lie perpetuated

by the emperor that those girls whose blood runs gold are demons has been defeated. This study establishes that these girls who have been despised are actually daughters of goddesses whose Emperorship was usurped. "*The Gilded Ones* were never infernal beings" (Forna, 287). The goddesses are freed in the last battle.

The Gilded Ones too who had been entombed while a live, are freed after the defeat of the Emperor. This epitomizes the defeat of dictatorial and autocratic rule by a young generation that is intent on seeding democracy, fairness and justice for all. She resurrects the goddesses using her magical powers. "Mother AnokArise" (Forna, 304). She frees all four of them who represent generational leadership and they stand for the first time in a thousand years; embodying a new dispensation of truth, amity and prosperity. They move ahead to occupy the seat of power.

CONCLUSION

Forna, in her debut novel *The Gilded Ones* has followed in the footsteps of another Nigerian writer, Nnedi Okorafor in invoking the use of magic realism to address socio-cultural and political concerns of the twenty first century. Her dexterous skills allow her text to adapt magic realism in making commentaries about human identity at crossroads, political Machiavellianism that is compounded by voraciousness. This study concludes that Forna has succeeded in entrenching a new political hegemony through the use of magic realism which is one facet of postmodernism.

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